PREFACE FOR THE QUALITY INDICATORS FOR THE PROVISION OF ACCESSIBLE EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS AND ACCESSIBLE TECHNOLOGIES (DRAFT)

# Purpose

The purpose of the Quality Indicators and Critical Components is to assist state and local education agencies, institutions of higher education and workforce development agencies with planning, implementing, and evaluating dynamic, coordinated systems for the timely provision of accessible educational materials (AEM) and accessible technologies. Given the variability of policies and practices across these organizations, the Quality Indicators and Critical Components are designed to provide agencies with consistent goals and to promote discussion around multiple methods to achieve those goals.

# Development

Since 2014 the National Center on Accessible Educational Materials for Learning (AEM Center) at CAST has had the responsibility to provide resources and technical assistance related to accessible materials and technologies to stakeholders in early learning, K-12 education, postsecondary education and workforce development. Building upon the prior work in the K-12 arena, the AEM Center expanded seven Quality Indicators to include foundational elements that can be used by agencies at all levels to guide development of effective, efficient systems for the timely provision of accessible printed and technology-based course materials.

The Quality Indicators, which are brief statements that define what high quality services look like in the provision of AEM, are designed to assist with the implementation of statutory requirements that apply to state and local education agencies, institutions of higher education and workforce preparation agencies. Relevant federal laws mandate that these stakeholders provide children, youth and adults with disabilities equitable access to all learning materials, including printed materials, digital materials, and technologies. Although several statutes apply to state and local education agencies, this requirement is most prominently included in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which specifies that all students with disabilities who need accessible educational materials and technologies must be provided with them. Postsecondary institutions have similar mandates in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 504). In addition, agencies in workforce development systems must attend to the mandates in Section 188 of the Workforce Investment Act/Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIA/WIOA). For details on how these laws apply to the provision of accessible educational materials and technologies, see the Policies & Systems section of the AEM Center’s website (<http://aem.cast.org/policies>).

Critical Components of each Quality Indicator have been developed to provide actionable items that can be used to evaluate, improve or transform existing systems. These were determined by identifying best practices for implementing every aspect of the provision of accessible materials and technologies. Sources for the development of the Critical Components included research, policies, and expert guidance that have contributed to positive outcomes for related agencies and the individuals served.

# Use

The Quality Indicators and Critical Components are intended to be used across agencies in all stakeholder groups and by a wide range of personnel, individuals and families. For example, at a systems level, leaders may use the Quality Indicators and Critical Components to update and improve policies for procuring accessible materials and technologies for system-wide use. At smaller scales, they may be used to develop guidance for selecting and creating accessible materials for curricular and programmatic use. Personnel at all levels may find them useful for determining and requesting sufficient resources for implementing accessible materials and technologies in varied settings, including classrooms, home, and the workplace. Users of the Quality Indicators may want to build background knowledge on any aspect of accessible educational materials and technologies by going to the AEM Center’s website (<http://aem.cast.org/>).

# Foundational Principles

Several basic assumptions underlie the application of the Quality Indicators and Critical Components for the intended purpose of meeting an agency’s accessibility requirements.

1. The Quality Indicators and their accompanying Critical Components are interdependent. No Quality Indicator is intended to stand on its own without the others.
2. AEM efforts, at all stages, require ongoing collaboration between the agency or institution and federal, state and local personnel, families and caregivers, other service agencies and individuals with disabilities.
3. All AEM-related services and products developed and delivered by agencies are legally correct according to the mandates and expectations of federal and state statutes and regulations.
4. All AEM-related products developed or procured must meet robust accessibility standards, which are described on the AEM Center’s website under Accessibility Standards, Specifications & Guidelines (<http://aem.cast.org/creating/accessibility-standards-specifications-guidelines.html)>.

# AEM and Universal Design for Learning (UDL): Complementary Supports for All Learners

Thoughtfully implementing and sustaining a coordinated system of AEM-related services aligned to the Quality Indicators requires time and effort. The result, however, is expected to provide a high return on investment since accessible materials and technologies are assets to *all learners*. Accessibility improves product responsivity to all users’ needs and preferences by providing multiple options for access and engagement. Accessibility features promote choices for how learners see, hear, comprehend, or interact with materials and technologies, thereby interconnecting with instructional methods designed to address learner variability. This connection is best described by Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn. Referenced in the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, UDL is fundamentally represented in the Critical Components of the Quality Indicators for the Provision of AEM and Accessible Technologies.

# Connect with the AEM Center

For more information and resources, please visit the AEM Center’s website <http://aem.cast.org/>

For assistance, please contact AEM Center staff via email: [aem@cast.org](mailto:aem@cast.org)

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